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SUBJECT: YEMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTRY REACTS TO HUMAN  
RIGHTS REPORT

**11. SUMMARY:** On March 30, Yemen's Human Rights Minister, Amat Al-Alim Soswa held a press conference formally announcing Yemen's response to the 2004 U.S. Human Rights Report on Yemen. Copies of a fifty-page document containing a detailed response to the U.S. report were distributed to approximately fifty people present at the conference. END SUMMARY

**12.** The Human Rights Minister listed what she considered major points of the U.S. report including child trafficking, security detentions, prison conditions and press freedom. Soswa pointed out that in the ROYG's opinion, the report described "generalizations" that were repeated over and over, and "lacked objectivity and specific examples or evidence to support these findings. The Minister also focused on measures taken by the ROYG to improve certain aspects of its human rights record. The Minister, however, welcomed "constructive" criticism that could help Yemen promote the status of human rights for its people, and emphasized that Yemen deals with such reports with complete transparency and clarity. More specifically, the Minister welcomed the U.S. Human Rights Report and any other international reports "that make us aware of our shortcomings so that we may be able to contain them." As for the U.S. report, continued the Minister, "it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the political structure of Yemen and of the relationships that govern different government branches and authorities. Turning to human rights abuses by the Political Security Organization (PSO) and Ministry of Interior officers, the Minister said she considered the use of certain terminologies, such as "serious" violations, as "stereotypical" because they keep recurring every year.

**13.** Questions raised at the press conference were a mixture of criticism to both the ROYG and the USG. The U.S. was accused of "interfering" with Yemen's domestic affairs and not respecting human rights in the Arab region or inside America. The ROYG was cited for not admitting that the status of human rights in Yemen is "catastrophic." Participants made special reference to human rights abuses committed by police and PSO officers particularly against journalists. Corruption in the judiciary was also highlighted.

**14.** Some participants encouraged the Human Rights Ministry to deal "more seriously" with international human rights reports, including the American one. The H.R. Ministry was criticized by many for "defending" the PSO and warned against being used by the ROYG as a "platform" to mask actual human rights violations. Some went so far as to request of Soswa that her Ministry address "seriously" the human rights violations committed by Yemeni security organizations.

**15.** Minister Soswa defended the Human Rights Ministry's role in addressing human rights abuses in Yemen. She explained the efforts of the Ministry to bring human rights abuses to the attention of the authorities and provide protection to the victims of such abuses.

**16.** In combating human rights abuses by the security establishment, Soswa stressed that the Ministry has made major strides by providing training to judicial and security authorities in order to raise awareness on relevant human rights laws and practices. As evidence of this progress, Soswa pointed out the Ministry is currently providing specialized training to 300 judges and security officers involved in human rights issues.

**17.** Some NGO representatives suggested that NGOs take charge of producing an annual well-documented report on human rights abuses in Yemen "instead of waiting for the U.S. report to come out every year." Minister Soswa indicated that her Ministry invited human rights NGOs to provide the Ministry with accurate, well-documented reports on human rights abuses and not limit their role to attending discussions and meetings. Soswa added that the Ministry is working with a consultation committee comprised of 35 NGOs

and tasked with providing options on how to best address Yemen's human rights problems. In addition, the H.R. Minister announced that a national report on human rights practices in Yemen will be issued in April 2005 identifying the most significant H.R. topics and proposing solutions to very critical issues.

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